

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY SAIGON IMMEDIATE

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TAGS:

SUBJECT: MC COMBS' STORY, WASHINGTON POST, MARCH 15

FOLLOWS TEXT OF MC COMBS' STORY IN WASHINGTON POST MARCH 15:

BEGIN TEXT.

"U. S. AMBASSADOR SEEKS INCREASE IN AID IN S. VIETNAM

SAIGON, MARCH 14 - U. S. AMBASSADOR GRAHAM A. MARTIN SAID THIS WEEK THAT SOUTH VIET-NAM NEEDS A LARGE INFUSION OF AMERICAN ECONOMIC AID OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS TO PREVENT AN ULTIMATE COMMUNIST VICTORY.

HE SAID 850 MILLION DOLLARS IS NEEDED NEXT YEAR AND "A SOMEWHAT LESSER AMOUNT" THE FOLLOWING YEAR. THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION HAS ASKED CONGRESS FOR 648 MILLION DOLLARS IN ECONOMIC AID FOR ALL OF INDOCHINA NEXT YEAR.

ON THE OTHER HAND, MARTIN SAID, U. S. MILITARY AID -- ABOUT 1.06 BILLION DOLLARS IN 1974 -- SHOULD REMAIN AT ITS PRESENT LEVEL FOR ANOTHER YEAR AND THEN "TAPER OFF."

THIS WOULD BE POSSIBLE, HE SAID, BECAUSE THE SOVIET UNION AND CHINA HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY DECREASED THEIR SUPPLY OF ARMS TO NORTH VIETNAM IN THIS PERIOD OF IMPROVED RELATIONS
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WITH THE U. S. AND FOLLOWING THE FINAL WITHDRAWAL OF

AMERICAN TROOPS FROM VIETNAM A YEAR AGO.

MARTIN, 61, A TALL, GRAY-HAIRED DIPLOMAT WHO IS ALTERNATELY CRUSTY AND CHARMING IN CONVERSATION, GAVE HIS VIEWS THIS WEEK IN HIS FIRST ON THE RECORD NEWSPAPER INTERVIEWS SINCE BEING SENT HERE EIGHT MONTHS AGO TO OVERSEE U. S. POSTWAR INTERESTS IN VIETNAM.

"YOU CAN DEBATE THE PAST, BUT WHERE IS OUR INTEREST NOW?" HE ASKED. "TO ME, IT'S BEING ABLE TO LOOK BACK A HALF DECADE OR A DECADE FROM NOW AND HAVE HISTORIANS SAY THAT IN THE END WE DID A FEW THINGS RIGHT AND WE CAME OUT ALL RIGHT."

HE SAID HE FEARS THAT CONGRESS, INFLUENCED BY WHAT HE SAID IS A HANOI-INSPIRED PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT OF PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN THIEU, WILL NOT GIVE SOUTH VIETNAM ENOUGH MONEY TO ALLOW IT TO ACHIEVE AN "ECONOMIC TAKEOFF," LEADING TO INDEPENDENCE FROM U. S. HELP.

IF SOUTH VIETNAM WERE TO BECOME COMMUNIST "AFTER IT WAS VERY CLEAR THAT WE DID EVERYTHING REASONABLY WE COULD HAVE DONE," HE SAID, "THAT'S ONE THING, BUT TO WALK AWAY FROM IT JUST AS THIS MOMENT IN TIME WOULD BE SOMETHING ELSE AGAIN

"THE UNITED STATES WOULD PAY AN ENORMOUS COST, A COST IN ITS OWN SELF-RESPECT, A COST IN A TURNING INWARD IN A NEW KIND OF ISOLATIONISM WHICH WOULD PROVIDE ENORMOUS DANGERS FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES AND FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD."

MARTIN SAID, "MY CONCERN WITH VIETNAM IS NOT SO MUCH WITH THE VIETNAMESE. MY CONCERN IS WHAT HAPPENS TO US (AMERICANS) AS A PEOPLE, THE WHOLE INTRICATE POWER BALANCE IN THE WORLD, AS THE WORLD PERCEIVES US AND PERCEIVES OUR WILL TO DO WHAT WE SAID WE'D DO."

IF SOUTH VIETNAM WERE TO RECEIVE THE ECONOMIC AID HE THINKS IT SHOULD HAVE, "THEN I THINK THE JOB WOULD BE UNCLASSIFIED

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LARGELY COMPLETED," SAID MARTIN.

THE ADMINISTRATION'S REQUEST FOR 648 MILLION DOLLARS IN ECONOMIC AID FOR INDOCHINA IN FISCAL YEAR 1975 -- EVEN IF THE TOTAL SUM WERE APPROVED BY CONGRESS -- WOULD HAVE TO BE DIVIDED AMONG SOUTH VIETNAM, CAMBODIA AND LAOS.

"THE REQUEST IS NOT ADEQUATE," SAID MARTIN. "IT'S ADEQUATE

TO MAINTAIN (THE ECONOMIC STATUS QUO) BUT NOT TO PERMIT US

TO WALK AWAY AND SAY 'OKAY YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN' AS WE DID
IN TAIWAN AND KOREA."

SOUTH VIETNAM IS RECEIVING THIS FISCAL YEAR ABOUT 320
MILLION DOLLARS IN U. S. AID -- LESS THAN IN ANY OF THE
PAST EIGHT YEARS.

MARTIN CALLED THIS AID "ABSOLUTELY MINIMAL." HE SAID THAT
AFTER THE CEASE-FIRE, THE UNITED STATES HAD PROMISED SOUTH
VIETNAM ENOUGH ECONOMIC AID "FOR A SURGE THING LIKE
EUROPE" DURING THE MARSHALL PLAN YEARS AFTER WORLD WAR II.

MARTIN SAID HE IS CONVINCED THAT TWO YEAR OF HEAVY ECONOMIC
AID IS ALL THAT SOUTH VIETNAM NEEDS NOW. HE SAID THE
SOUTH VIETNAMESE ARE "INGENIOUS, HARD-WORKING PEOPLE," AND
ADDED: -- "I AM CONVINCED THAT NOW THE SITUATION FOR AN
ECONOMIC TAKEOFF ON THE KOREAN-TAIWAN ECONOMIC MODEL IN
A VERY MUCH SHORTENED TIME IS HERE."

WITH THE RELATIVELY SMALL AMOUNT OF AID THIS YEAR, SAID
MARTIN, THE VIETNAMESE "HAVE TAKEN ALL THE RIGHT MEASURES.
THEY'VE SIMPLY TIGHTENED THEIR DAMN BELTS AND GONE ON."

THE PUBLIC STATEMENT OF MARTIN'S VIEWS COMES AT A CRITI-
CAL PERIOD FOR SOUTH VIETNAM, MORE THAN A YEAR AFTER THE
CEASE-FIRE.

THE CONTINUING WAR SEEMS TO HAVE QUIETED DOWN. HANOI
SEEMS TO BE CONCENTRATING ON ITS OWN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
AND SHELVE ANY PLANS FOR A MAJOR OFFENSIVE IN THE SOUTH.
BUT THE ECONOMY HERE IS SO SHAKY THAT ECONOMISTS HAVE SAID
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IT POSES AS MUCH OF A THREAT AS THE PRESENCE OF COMMUNIST
TROOPS.

THERE IS RAMPANT INFLATION, UNEMPLOYMENT AND A SCRAMBLE
FOR FOREIGN EXCHANGE IN THE WAKE OF THE AMERICAN PULL-
OUT.

THE MASSIVE, IMMEDIATE AMERICAN AID THAT MARTIN IS TALK-
ING ABOUT WOULD BE DESIGNED TO ENCOURAGE THE KIND OF
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ESPECIALLY IN EXPORT INDUSTRIES,
THAT THE YEARS OF WAR HAVE PREVENTED.

AT THE SAME TIME, THE COMMUNIST MILITARY THREAT IS NOT
NEGLECTIBLE. SINCE THE CEASE-FIRE, THE COMMUNISTS HAVE
BROUGHT ENOUGH MEN AND WEAPONS INTO THE SOUTH TO LAUNCH A

DEVASTATING OFFENSIVE, ACCORDING TO INTELLIGENCE REPORTS.

HOWEVER, THE OFFICIAL AMERICAN VIEW IS NOW THAT HANOI WILL NOT LAUNCH AN OFFENSIVE AND INSTEAD WILL CONTINUE MILITARY, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PRESSURE AGAINST SAIGON IN HOPES OF BRINGING DOWN THE GOVERNMENT.

MARTIN SAID THAT THE SOVIET UNION AND CHINA, NO LONGER AFRAID OF BEING ACCUSED BY THE OTHER OF ABANDONING NORTH VIETNAM, "CAN NOW BEGIN TO LOOK AT HANOI IN TERMS OF THEIR OWN NATIONAL INTERESTS. IT IS NOT TO THE INTEREST OF EITHER ONE OF THEM FOR HANOI TO HAVE A DOMINANT POSITION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA."

PRESIDENT NIXON'S BUDGET REQUEST FOR FISCAL 1975 INCLUDED ABOUT 1.4 BILLION DOLLARS IN MILITARY AID FOR SAIGON. "I REALLY DON'T WORRY MUCH ABOUT THIS SIDE OF IT," MARTIN SAID, ADDING THAT MILITARY AID THIS YEAR "COULD HAVE BEEN DRASTICALLY REDUCED IF HANOI HAD LIVED UP TO THE CEASE-FIRE."

THROUGHOUT THE INTERVIEWS, MARTIN EMPHASIZED HIS BELIEF THAT HANOI, AND NOT SAIGON, HAS BEEN PRIMARILY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FAILURE OF THE ACCORD TO BRING AN END TO THE FIGHTING AND TO START THE ORDERLY PROCESS THAT WOULD ULTIMATELY LEAD TO ELECTIONS.

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MARTIN SAID PART OF HANOI'S CURRENT STRATEGY AGAINST SAIGON IS A SOPHISTICATED "PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN WHICH IS DELIBERATELY DESIGNED TO FORCE THE AMERICAN CONGRESS TO LIMIT THE ECONOMIC AID."

THE AMBASSADOR MAKE A SIMILAR CHARGE LAST WEEK IN AN 18-PAGE CABLE TO THE STATE DEPARTMENT, WHICH IT RELEASED AT HIS RECOMMENDATION. MARTIN WAS ATTACKING AN ARTICLE IN THE NEW YORK TIMES LAST MONTH THAT SAID U. S. MILITARY AID STILL DETERMINES THE COURSE OF THE WAR.

IN THE INTERVIEWS, MARTIN SAID THE CUTTING EDGE OF HANOI'S CAMPAIGN IS THE CHARGE THAT SAIGON IS HOLDING 200,000 CIVILIAN POLITICAL PRISONERS AND ENGAGING IN SYSTEMATIC TORTURE AND REPRESSION.

HE SAID THIS CAMPAIGN, WHICH HAS ENGAGED THE ENTHUSIASM OF AMERICAN PEACE GROUPS, SOME JOURNALISTS, AND SOME AIDES ON CAPITOL HILL, IS DESIGNED TO CREATE THE IMPRESSION THAT, "IF YOU'RE AGAINST EVIL, TORTURE AND REPRESSION, AS MOST AMERICANS ARE, THEN WE DON'T WANT TO GIVE AID TO A REGIME LIKE THIS."

DESCRIBING HIMSELF AS "AN OLD-FASHIONED, LIBERAL HUMANITARIAN," WHO HAS FROM TIME TO TIME BATTLED FOR PRISON REFORMS AS A PUBLIC SERVANT IN THE NEW DEAL AND THEN IN THE

FOREIGN SERVICE, MARTIN SAID HE IS NOW CONVINCED THAT THE CHARGES ARE NOT TRUE.

HE SAID HE ORDERED THE EMBASSY STAFF TO CONDUCT AN IN-DEPTH STUDY OF THE QUESTION SHORTLY AFTER HE ARRIVED HERE. HE SAID HE AND THE EMBASSY STAFF USED ALL THE MEANS AT THEIR DISPOSAL TO GET AT THE TRUTH.

THEY FOUND, HE SAID, THAT SOUTH VIETNAM'S CIVILIAN PRISON POPULATION IS ABOUT 35,000 -- ON A PER CAPITA BASIS ROUGHLY WHAT THE PRISON POPULATION IS IN THE UNITED STATES. IF THERE ARE ABUSES IN THE PRISONS, HE SAID, THEY ARE NOT WIDESPREAD, AND NOT SYSTEMATIC.
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HE SAID THAT AMONG THESE PRISONERS THERE PROBABLY ARE NOT MORE THAN A HANDFUL OF POLITICAL PRISONERS -- WHICH HE DEFINED AS PERSONS IMPRISONED SOLELY BECAUSE OF OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT -- AND THAT HE HAD NOT YET BEEN GIVEN THE NAME OF A SINGLE PRISONER WHO, WHEN CHECKED OUT, FELL INTO THIS CATEGORY.

COMMENTING ON A WASHINGTON POST ARTICLE LAST SATURDAY SAYING THAT MARTIN SAID HE DOESN'T "CONSCIOUSLY" THINK OF HIMSELF AS SUPPORTING THIEU OR NOT.

"HE'S HERE, I FOUND HIM HERE," SAID MARTIN. "IT'S NOT MY BUSINESS TO SUPPORT THIEU OR ANYTHING ELSE. IT'S MY BUSINESS TO SUPPORT THE INTERESTS OF THE UNITED STATES."

END TEXT. KISSINGER

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